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OBSERVATIONS

BY AN OBSCURE MEDIOCRITY, ON A RECENTLY
PUBLISHED BROCHURE ENTITLED

"THE NEMESIS OF MEDIOCRITY"



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Stevenson, Frederick Wain.
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TO THE INSTIGATOR

OBSERVATIONS

BY AN OBSCURE MEDIOCRITY, ON A RECENTLY
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“THE NEMESIS OF MEDIOCRITY”

September, 1918.

A mirror has recently been held up before the world by a man of seemingly great intellectuality, who descants upon the ghastly sights he sees therein.

The world is rapidly going to the demnition bow-wows! Culture and civilization are passing away! Society is sinking “under the nemesis of universal mediocrity!” “All mankind has been reduced to a “dead level of incapacity!”

“Inch by inch the [human] valleys are being filled and the mountains brought low!” A “reign of mediocrity” has been established! Meanwhile “the sands slide under our feet, and we touch nothing tangible as we reach out for support in a darkness that shows no sign of breaking!”

“The thing we have so earnestly and arduously built up out of Renaissance, Reformation and Revolution¹ with industrialism and scientific determinism as the structural material, is not a civilization at all, and it must be destroyed in order that the ground may be cleared for something better”! Over in France and Italy, the nations “are blindly and half unconsciously fighting for the last shreds of honour and liberty left over from an old Christian civilization!”

The disconsolate lecturer who makes this mournful outcry, says that our system of popular *education* is “probably the worst ever devised so far as character making is concerned!” It has “failed to produce appreciable results!” It has “left native character untouched!” It has helped to bring on “the reign of mediocrity!” It is “prowling through the ruins of scientific determinism, and struggling ever to build out of its shreds and shards some new machine that will make even more certain the direct application of scholastic results to the one problem of wealth production!”

¹A new trio of R's, used twice in *The Nemesis* and hereafter to be as famous, perhaps, as Brother Burchard's in 1884.

To the eyes of this distressed intellectual gentleman, the mirror discloses most heartrending sights resulting from immigration without limit and from "unrestrained mating amongst men and women of alien racial qualities,—“the free and reckless mixing of incompatible strains.” He sees “the substitution of the mongrel for the product of pure blood!” He sees that in large sections of America, society “is now completely mongrel!” He sees that if continued for another generation or two, “the result can only be universal mongrelism and the consequent end of culture and civilization!” He sees that the result of “cross-fertilization” is either “a hybrid without power of propagation, or a precarious phenomenon tending inevitably towards a retrogression that in a few generations comes back to the normal type!” He moans that “there is no tragedy greater than that of the human soul full of the promise and potency and desire of good things, imprisoned in the forbidding circle of mongrel blood, inimical inheritance and pernicious environment against which it desperately rebels, but from which there is no possibility of escape except through the power of supernatural assistance on which it no longer possesses the impulse or the will to call!” (A most sadly beautiful example of soulful, aesthetic and classical pathos, is it not!)

He sees that *religion* is "now impotent amongst the nations," that it has disappeared "as a vital force in human life and society;" that ever since the Reformation, religion "has gone back to the catacombs whence Constantine had drawn it fifteen centuries ago;" has been "only a dissolving tradition, without any real force or potency in and over society" and that its disappearance as such a vital force has helped to fix "the manacles of capitalism and industrial slavery on the world!"

He sees *philosophy* "still clinging to the shreds and tatters of evolution or remodeling itself on the plausible lines of an intellectualized materialism!"

He sees in the mirror many other shocking and ghastly sights and horrors, that we have not space to describe.²

The trouble is not due to the War. That has simply helped to reveal the dire conditions. The War's revelations "have cast a searching and mordant light" on what we may call the left-

'For Heaven's sake, let's sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories about everything;
And see which one amongst us shall weep first;
And from the tangled skein of circumstance
Let's weave a web of dreariest argument,
And make us comfortably miserable. (Anon.)

overs of the nineteenth century, and have shown how many counterfeits and thin dogmas there were among them, and have enabled the professor, we understand, to discover the "cataclysm that has occurred."

The trouble is all due to the *loss of leadership*,—leadership "that matches in power the exigency of the demand!" (The lecturer uses no common speech, as already seen). "Of all the ruined sanctuaries, that of statemanship is the most desolate,"—but it is almost as bad in the field of war, religion, philosophy, literature, art and education! Not only our own beloved country, but also England, France and Italy, indeed, all countries, (for the lecturer is not provincial) are totally lacking "guides, interpreters, leaders,"—"seers, prophets, captains of men,"—"statesmen, philosophers, artists, religious prophets and shepherds,"—such as are demanded by the times!³

"The day of great leaders has passed!"
"There is none to answer, "*in any category of life, issuing out of any nation!*" Meanwhile, "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed!"

³But do not carry the idea too far,—for "great leaders could not have averted the war," a comforting line on p. 45.

Indeed, great leaders "are no longer wanted or brought into existence!"⁴

To express the idea that the masses, realizing their own incapacity, naturally look for a genuine leader, our literary virtuoso presents this symphonic gem:

"Now as always the great masses of men look for the master-man who can form in definite shape the aspirations and the instincts that in them are formless and amorphous; who can lead where they are more than willing to follow, but themselves cannot mark the way; who can act as a centripetal force and gather into potent units the diffuse atoms of like will but without coordinating ability."

But not finding the genuine, they take a counterfeit, as he shows in the lofty style:

"So great is this central human instinct (which

'Yet, paradoxical as it may seem, "the soul of sane man demands leadership" and today as never before, "men cry aloud" for leadership. And paradoxically, also, leadership "has not been lost but only changed in direction",—to business pursuits. "The point is, however, that leadership, while it may conceivably *supplement* that of an earlier day in other fields, may, under no circumstances whatever be assumed to serve as a *substitute*". pp 2, 31, 46.

was not only the foundation of feudalism but harks back to the very beginnings of society), that when the great leader is not revealed he is invented out of the more impudent element of any potential group, assurance taking the place of competence [Let us remember these words]; or optimistically assumed, the most available being dragged from his obscurity and pitched into a position, or burdened with a task, outside the limits of his ability—as he himself only too often knows!”

And the counterfeits do their best to look like the genuine, as he declaims, thusly:

“Arduously they struggle to build up a following, to see the insane life of the moment and see it whole; to keep ahead of the whirlwind of hell-let-loose and direct an amazed and disordered society along paths of ultimate safety. And always the event outdistances them, the phantasmagoria of chaos whirls bewilderingly beyond, and either they follow helplessly or are sucked into the rushing vacuum that comes in the wake of progressive destruction!”

Concerning these counterfeits collectively, the lecturer describes them further as “the specious demagogue, the unscrupulous master of effront-

ery"—“pitchforked into pre-eminence, * * * degraded and debased by dullness, obliquity of vision and crude incompetence”—“pitched neck-and-crop into big places”—“the synthetic product of a mechanical process of self-expression on the part of groups of men without leaders, but who must have them and so make shift to precipitate them in material form out of the undifferentiated mass of their common inclinations, passions and prejudices!”

Religion, he says, is “no longer marked by the dominance” of what we may call the old time saints or the medieval celebrities, “but rather by the uncouth flotsam⁵ of the intellectual underworld or the obscurantist faquirs⁵ of a decadent Orientalism!” (Oh, joy, let us remember this when we meet our Domine next time.)

Philosophy is no longer controlled in its des-

⁵From the Dictionary: *Flotsam*, goods lost by shipwreck and floating on the sea, in distinction from jetsam. *Jetsam*,—goods which sink when cast into the sea, and remain under water. *Jejune*,—devoid of life, point or interest, dry; wanting in substance, empty, meager, bare. *Faquirs*,—same as fakir. *Fakir*,—a Mohammedan ascetic, religious mendicant or mendicant priest. *Obscurantist*,—from obscurantism, the principles and spirit that tend to prevent enlightenment and the progress of science.

tinies by the Plato-Spencer type, but by "semi-converted novelists, jejune⁵ instructors in psychology, and imperfectly developed but sufficiently voluble journalists!"

It will be seen from these typical excerpts that the lecturer is also "sufficiently voluble," that Susannah's trouble is not his.

"Two adjectives Susannah knows;
On these she takes her stand.
No matter how this old world goes,
It's either *fierce* or *grand*."

We are told the exact year since which this dearth of leaders has existed. It is the year 1905. Up to that fateful year things were going pretty well, it seems, in this particular respect.

The lecturer has himself made a catalogue of all the great leaders of the world who were living in 1880. There was a confusing "plethora of options" in those days. There were sixty of them who "would be accepted by all as leaders of men". He could add another hundred "of only a little less eminence" but that might

raise a dispute.⁶ "*All these hundred and sixty 'immortals' had died before 1905!*"

The allusion is to "those astonishing years" from 1880 to 1905, "a generation that lacks nothing in leadership".⁷ If the "arbitrary quarter century" chosen by the lecturer could be extended to cover the period from 1870 to 1910, he could increase the count of great names "to two hundred", and the lecturer challenges anyone "to fill a tenth of the places they (the 160) left vacant, with the names, unknown in 1880, of men whose claim can be unquestioned."⁸

The idea will come to the mind of more than one mediocre person that possibly the lecturer,

⁶p. 9. On p. 21, it seems, the number falls to "one hundred and fifty." (Doubtless a printer's error.)

⁷p. 10. But paradoxically again, "the last quarter of the nineteenth century",—"was not an epoch to which future generations will look back with any notable degree of pride; yet it left us a heritage of great names" which "reached the number of one hundred and fifty",—a "century and a half of names", as he says. (pp. 21, 10).

⁸This challenge is not as clear in meaning to a mediocrity as we would expect from an "intellectual." Why "unknown in 1880"? "Unknown" to whom? "Unquestioned" by whom? But possibly we may summon sufficient courage ere we end, to meet the challenge, taking a chance on a sportsmanlike interpretation of it.

with all his erudition, cannot estimate the greatness of the present generation of men as well as some future intellectual noble, looking backward, may be able to do,—that oft-times a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own time,—that contemporaries of great men have sometimes but not always been unanimous in putting them on the list, while later generations only have been able to see the full richness of their worth. But the lecturer has not overlooked the argument. It “has no validity.” He can remember he worshipped some of those 160 men on his 1880-1905 list, and he knows they were unquestioned leaders. Besides, “leadership is not posthumous.” The idea is therefore overruled. (However, there remains a lingering feeling that the full *acknowledgement* of leadership is many times posthumous.)

How much the world would like to see this wiseacre’s complete catalogue of 160, comprising the 1880-1905 leaders, he did not realize. It might enable the contemporary world more clearly to have its day in court, as it were,—to determine whether his ideas of the characteristics and qualifications of a great leader are in harmony with its own, or whether he is human and judges from his own standpoint and is influenced by his

politics, prejudices, inclinations and specialties, as some of the rest of us are. Possibly he is here lost in his intellectuality. Possibly a star has warped out of its orbit. Perhaps the listing of great leaders is outside the lecturer's sphere. Let us see how he defines the leadership "that matches in power the exigency of the demand." We think his definition is found on page 6 of *The Nemesis*, previously quoted but so delicious as to bear repetition: * * * "the master man who can form in definite shape the aspirations and the instincts that in them [the great mass of men] are formless and amorphous; who can lead where they are more than willing to follow, but themselves cannot mark the way; who can act as a centripetal force and gather into potent units the diffuse atoms of like will but without co-ordinating ability!"

Lest, however, this brilliant display should dazzle plain people, some of the "uncouth flotsam of the intellectual underworld," let us look further for a softer light; in fragments, it may be found: "* * * leaders of an intellectual or moral capacity above that of the general mass of voters" — "the strong man, strong of mind, of will, of moral sense, the man born to create and to lead." The needed qualities include, we gather, greatness, quality, capacity and dominance equal to

those of the leaders of former times,—especially between 1880-1905. If a candidate for the list finds his following “through [their?] comprehension of his own force and dominance,”—it is a point in his favor. If, however, he finds it “*faute de mieux*, and because there are no others to lead,” then he is a counterfeit. If he is like the 1880-1905 type, “who first saw beyond the obvious and drew others after him by force of vision and will and personal quality,” then he gets honorable mention, at least. (A rather ill-marked yard-stick, on the whole, we think.)

The practical application of the lecturer’s rules for locating great leaders, appears to a limited extent from his published list of eighteen names, forming a part of the otherwise unpublished 1880-1905 catalogue of 160, which eighteen names we state in the order of the year of death:

Cavour, *died* 1861, and therefore included through oversight, of course.

Carlyle and Disraeli, died 1881;

Darwin, Emerson and Wagner, died 1882;

Tourguenieff, Russian novelist, and Karl Marx, German socialist, died 1883;

Matthew Arnold, critic, poet, essayist, died 1888;

Browning, died 1889;

Cardinal Newman, died 1890;
Von Moltke, died 1891;
Stevenson, writer of fiction, essays and poems,
died 1894;
William Morris, poet and artist, died 1896;
Bismarck, died 1898;
Ruskin, art critic, author, social reformer, died
1900;
Spencer, philosopher, and Leo XIII, died
1903.

With the possible exception of one, we observe, all were "intellectuals;" and the query arises, would the lecturer know a great leader, if he saw one in the mirror, unless the person happened to be also an "intellectual?" And this query suggests many others. Must one be an "intellectual" in order to be a great leader? How many portions of intellectuality must he have before he may be considered for the list? Must he know Greek and Latin at all, or even a second modern language? Must he be versed in ancient, medieval and modern literature, or even in the literature of any one period? Must he know the history of architecture or art in any form? Must he be "learned" in any direction? Is there a chance that any one who falls under the awful ban, "the uncouth flotsam of the

intellectual underworld," may be put upon the list? When we mediocrities assume, from our puny platforms, to make a list of great leaders, may not great achievement in ameliorating the condition of mankind, in places to which men may be assigned for long or short periods, by the choice of the people or by force of circumstances, take the place of intellectuality? Does not each decade produce its own types of great leaders, or must the candidates of all decades be measured by the same yard-stick? Is this a decade for a Darwin, a Wagner, a Browning, a Spencer, or an Emerson? Is it not rather a decade for a Hill, an Edison, a Marconi, a Ford, a Mott, a Hoover? Must leaders, to be great, be universally admired and recognized by their contemporaries? (Roosevelt, for example.) Is it not true that the question who is a great leader, is often one of personal opinion,—on the principle that orthodoxy is my doxy and heterodoxy is your doxy,—or is it determined by rules promulgated by the "intellectuals?" If a certain decade,—our own, say,—produces leaders "that match in power the exigency of the demand" of *the particular decade*, how is any one to say, even an "intellectual," as this particular one does, that such leaders "may conceivably supplement" but "may, under no circumstances whatever, be as-

sumed to serve as a substitute" for those on the 1880-1905 list?

It is to be observed that these are not assertions but merely queries of a mediocrity.

Let us now call the roll of contemporaries posing as statesmen, for example, who were living in 1880 and who did not die before 1905, and whom the learned lecturer dignifies by mention in *The Nemesis*.

Asquith: A "somewhat sinuous and agile mediocrity," says the lecturer,—rather flippantly, it seems to us, but perhaps we are unfair in this.

Lloyd George: "Does not fill the bill," says the lecturer,—dreadfully unclassical, heretofore, but we understand the meaning,—"another small man, essentially a middle-class demagogue of the first decade of the century, who has also been fortified and chastened by the compelling force of anomalous circumstances." (A sort of back-handed compliment, is it not?)

Churchill: "Still bending under the weight of tragic fiasco." (Disclosure by Ambassador Morgenthau too late to save Churchill.)

Clemenceau: "The superannuated."

Ribot: "Venerable, but neither stimulating or convincing."

Painleve: "Colorless." (We must excuse these monosyllabic dispositions. Our lecturer's time is short and he is dealing not alone with the whole world of statecraft but also the worlds of war, religion, philosophy, literature, art, and education.)

Italian statesmen: Have recently been mere "political hucksters and demagogues,"—none "of even moderate distinction."

So passes away earthly glory in other lands.

And in America? Surely something promising will now be found in the thesis.

Roosevelt: A doubtful compliment in sixty words: He "strove for a renewal of that popular confidence and to restore that popular following he so eminently deserved, and failed, though in this failure was less of discredit to him than to a public somewhat defective in its powers of perception and in its standard of comparative values." (This leaves us mediocrities somewhat in the dark,—some of us who would have been pleased to have had our belief that he is a great leader confirmed by a competent authority on the subject.)

Taft, Root, Hughes, McCall: Not mentioned. (Republicans).

Lodge, Borah and Williams: "Reliable honesty and ability,"—"conspicuous figures,"—honorable mention, as it were.

The Nemesis list of American statecraft contemporaries who did not die before 1905, in addition to those mentioned, and one other, contains only the names of Colonel House,—“the mysterious and promising figure,”—thanks for this ray of hope,—Stone, Cummings, Gronna, Clark, Vardaman and LaFollette, termed “ominous figures.” (No quarrel over this last classification.)

WILSON: Is *he* a leader “that matches in power the exigency of the demand?” A Democrat,—a statesman,—a writer,—and an intellectual nobleman, able to write in the grand and classic style when he pleases (which, thank God, is not often). “I recognize in him one possible exception, if there be one, that proves my rule; but I must be moderate in my rating of him, lest I raise too great hopes; mine is not a message of hope,”—says our lecturer, in effect.

“The most august figure of all?” (Note the interrogation point). “Here, *if anywhere today*, is revealed the argument against the thesis I adduce—*perhaps* as the exception that proves the

rule; * * * astute politician, * * * the acceptable type of leader (for three years) who does not lead but obediently follows on where the majority-will indicates the way." Then this changed and "as the inclusive incapacity of the democratic method revealed itself, it was relegated to the background while a very real and equally constructive leadership took its place"; * * * novel and reassuring leadership * * * single leadership * * * real leadership, of the old and almost forgotten type,"—1880-1905, we understand,—“a daring and therefore true leadership prefigured by some of the *finest verbal pronouncements* of high principle the Republic has thus far heard.” (Followed by a good cuff for his “peace without victory” utterance and other disapproved pre-war sayings). “*Does this mean,*” continues the lecturer, “that from now on the course followed will be increasingly exalted, high-spirited and courageous”? (Note again the interrogation mark.) “It may well be; *if so, and to that extent*, the present lack of world-leadership will be corrected”.

The Lord be praised for this one if-so-and-to-that-extent-perhaps- possible exception, even if it does prove the rule! There is still, then, at least one ray of hope for this part of the world; but it is clouded to our eyes by the fear that but for

those "finest verbal pronouncements" there might not have been found any proof of the rule. May Wilson have long life!

And now we come to the major proposition of the entire thesis. What is the cause of this loss of leadership? "To what are we to attribute this anomalous condition?" "We [in the general sense] reach out blindly for some explanation of the cataclysm that has occurred." But the lecturer has a special lamp that has penetrated the darkness, enabling him to be very positive.

"The answer is simple," says he. IT IS DEMOCRACY. Not the democracy "of ideal," but democracy "in the current sense;" not the democracy which, "in its protean forms" seeks to attain abolition of privilege, equal opportunity for all and utilization of ability, but the democracy "of method,"—the kind of democracy we have had for a long time and have now, *the existing democracy*. It is concerning the existing democracy that the lecturer is speaking, in the lines to be referred to below.

We hesitate to circulate the doleful news; but here it is:

Democracy has suffered a period ("for exactly one hundred years") of "progressive degen-

eration!" It "is incapable of accomplishing the democratic ideal!" It is a case of "the political survival of the unfit!" "The system has doomed itself, since, impotent to produce leaders, it has signed its own death warrant!" It has "eliminated sane, potent and constructive leadership!" It is democracy that has produced the "universal mediocrity," that has reduced all mankind to "a dead level of incapacity!" Society has been wholly democratized, "not by filling in the valleys and lifting the malarial swamps of the submerged masses, but by a leveling of all down to their plane!" The "almost sublime incapacity" of democracy in all matters where it has had a part, has been revealed during the Great War! "The War reveals us as a helpless, inefficient people!"

For two generations before the Great War, democracy had been "corrupt, incompetent and ridiculous!" In the year before the War, in the three great democracies, Great Britain, France and the United States, it was "profoundly cursed by the incubus of little men in great office, by chaotic, selfish and unintelligent legislation, dull, stupid and frequently venal administration, and by partial, unscrupulous and pettifogging *judicial* procedure!" And when the Great War began, there was an "apotheosis of inefficiency, injustice and unrighteousness!" "Military, political

and psychological blunders have followed each other in a witch's sabbath of incapacity!"

Democracy "is now not a blessing but a menace!" The only thing that has saved the Allies from disaster, *has been the elimination of democracy and the substitution of "a pure and perfectly irresponsible absolutism!"*. (Wilson among others, we think, is here meant). "Barring the miracle of redemption through bitter chastisement", we are "hurrying on to anarchy or slavery as the fortunes of war may determine!"¹⁰ Indeed, democracy without the big leaders before referred to,—and their day is past,—"*is a greater menace than autocracy*" (!!)

Our lecturer has made a second list,—a list of "mechanical toys" insanely devised, as he says, during the last hundred years (despite those old times great leaders?) for the achieving of the democracy of ideal, namely: "representative government,—the parliamentary system,—universal suffrage,—the party system,—the secret ballot,—rotation in office,—the initiative, referendum and recall,—popular election of members of the

¹⁰On the present war news, our bet is anarchy, if either.

upper legislative houses,—woman suffrage,—direct legislation.”

These “toys” have made things worse. “Government and society have become progressively more venal, less competent and further separated from the ideals of honour, duty and righteousness!” Meanwhile new “nostrums” are being searched for, and “we have now wholly forgotten in what democracy consists!”

After peace comes again,—if it ever does,—its return “will be for the briefest of periods,” to be followed by a “second world-wide convulsion, the war for the revolutionizing of society,—etc., etc., etc.

Any ray of hope? Scarcely. It may possibly come by “a miracle of redemption through bitter chastisement!” Of course, miracles are decidedly rare. There is a suggestion that if Prussian autocratic efficiency can be shattered, the world may be saved “from a fate it richly deserves.” But even then can we say that we have a “better hope?” Yes,—if there come either a “spiritual regeneration of the great mass of the people” so that they also “gain a victory over the enemy at home in religion, philosophy and so-

ciety, purging a chastened world of the last folly and the last wickedness of modernism" (a rather vague purging prescription, it seems to us) or, as a substitute, if there come once more such big leaders as we had before 1905.

But if neither of those two things happen, and if the world returns to the present style of democracy,—then what? "*Russia has already given the answer,*" says the lecturer, dramatically.

Whose wail is this? From what quarter comes this *untimely* pessimistic indiscretion, this monstrous display of presumption, this pronounced example of "assurance taking the place of competence?" Whose opinion and belief besides the writer's does it express? Are "intellectuals" generally in sympathy with its utterances? Have any of the class repudiated them? Who, then, is back of them? Are they an example of the subtle work of the German propaganda bureau? What better propaganda could the Kaiser and his band of autocrats have distributed among their millions of enemies? How quite in harmony it is with the definition of democracy by a German scholar, who said,—"*Democracy is a thing, infirm of purpose, jealous, timid, change-*

able, unthorough, without foresight, blundering along in an age of lucidity, by confused instincts!" *If taken seriously*, what propaganda could weaken so much the ardor of the people who are contributing their time, their fortunes and their blood to the present world struggle? How weak and harmless, when compared to the deliberately written and widely published *Nemesis*,—which has already had two editions,—are the more or less casual utterances on the street, to a few, which in these days have sent men to internment camps or to jails! If some poor unintellectual devil, brought up perhaps in anarchistic surroundings and therefore in a degree excusable, should in these days gather ten men about him and utter in common speech the thoughts about democracy expressed in *The Nemesis*, how long would he retain his liberty?

The *Nemesis* comes out of Boston, the hub of intellectuality,—and of provincialism. However pleased the friends of the Kaiser might be to have the ideas given wide circulation, they had no part, we may be sure, in its preparation. It is the work of RALPH ADAMS CRAM, builder of Gothic churches, professor of architecture in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with an honorary Litt.D from Princeton and an honorary

LL.D. from Yale, author of books, a "learned" man, and a loyal citizen,—who doesn't speak well of the Germans either.

We mediocrities do not under-estimate the importance and the practical value of intellectuality. It would be a distinct loss to the world if the highest and best type of intellectuality should be lost. Those possessing it play an important part in the world's development,—but more often when they are following the old maxim about the cobbler and his last. We see great value in their books, but more especially when they stick to the subjects in which their life work has made them learned. When they translate and elucidate ancient writings, we applaud their results. When they design Gothic churches, we admire them. But we do not go to them with great confidence for advice as to how to vote, or how to invest our money, or how to judge the capacity of our contemporaries, or how to rate well-known characters in contemporary history. In other words, we "jes nachelly" put a limit on their ability to draw right conclusions and to advise *outside their particular lines of activity*; for, alas, they are too often provincial, giving vastly undue importance to their ideas and conclusions about matters outside their small circle or sphere.

“One science only will one genius fit,
So vast is art, so narrow human wit.”

And if we felt that the world of democracy needed a warning on the subjects dealt with in *The Nemesis*, we would not have it come dressed up in stilted intellectual verbiage.¹¹ Some writers seem to have a fear that their readers will not be sufficiently impressed with their intellectuality. If, in order to bring about “a spiritual regeneration of the great mass of people” (one alternative for saving us from perdition,) we need to warn “the great mass of people” of the cataclysm which Dr. Cram has discovered, let us get a Dooley or a baseball reporter, or at least a simpler “intellectual” (making sure we do not pick from “the more impudent element of any potential group”) to help in the task, for the benefit of the plain people, the mediocrities, the “uncouth flotsam of the intellectual underworld,”—who collectively do great things sometimes, when told of the need for them. If the situation is as de-

¹¹Not long ago one of the “intellectuals”, writing in the *New York Times*, bemoaned the fact that they had not warned the world of the coming Great War. An irreverent paragrapher remarked that they had given the warning but because it was they who had given it, the world paid no attention.

picted by Dr. Cram, let us tell the story to them under a simple title that does not repel, and tell it simply "as to a little child," and let us not say too much. There is an adage,—he who proves too much proves nothing.

The great leaders of the past,—have they sprung mostly from the intellectual nobility? It is our recollection that most of them had a more humble origin. This lamentation, this dire warning of impending calamity must not be brought to the attention of the intellectual nobility only,—if it is a serious matter; for it is not impossible that, with wide circulation among "the great mass of people," before it is too late there may spring up—even from "the submerged masses" or from the despised "uncouth flotsam of the intellectual underworld"—great leaders, equal to those who died before 1905.

But we do not understand that Dr. Cram has any private sources of information. He is merely expressing his opinion. Let us not be unduly alarmed. Perhaps he is wrong. Before giving up the fight "over there" for democracy, before adopting autocracy or socialism or whatever it is that Dr. Cram believes in, let us get the opinion of other "intellectuals" who wear stronger human spectacles and have a wider horizon; who live

more in the present and less in the Middle Ages, —“when the ideal of democracy was at its highest point and when it was most nearly achieved,” as the Doctor thinks; who have come into more intimate contact with the plain people; who, for example, have passed beyond the line “where the West begins,” not merely in a Pullman car on the California or the Overland Limited on the way to Santa Barbara or Coronado Beach; but who have seen, close at hand, examples of the prevailing type of men and women who are the product of the “unrestrained mating amongst men and women of alien racial qualities,” the “mongrels” to whom Dr. Cram scornfully refers,—splendid Americans, industrious, thrifty, honest, capable, healthy, patriotic to a high degree, as shown by actions, contributing mightily to the up-building of the vast territorial empires beyond the Mississippi river.¹² Such “intellectuals” may have a better opinion of the mongrel attainments and more hope of our ultimate regeneration. Perhaps the Doctor does not voice the sentiments of “intellectuals” generally. Possibly some of them may let us know the fact and cheer us with contrary expounding.

¹²It might be said that they are full-blooded mongrels!

Of course, *we* cannot see the cracks and crevices, the "washes," the snares and other pitfalls on the deserts of democracy, as well as he who is at a higher altitude. Nevertheless, within the short additional space that may possibly be taken without impropriety by a mediocrity, with all humility and with as bright eyes and as cheerful hearts as we possess, after so gloomy a portrayal of our condition and our fate,—let us consider the situation from our relatively low viewpoint.

We see the human plain inhabited by a people who are now as never before experiencing abolition of privilege, equal opportunity for all and utilization of ability,—the conditions which democracy "in its protean forms" seeks to attain. *We* think that the human mountains having "inch by inch" been "brought low" and the human valleys having likewise been "filled" as the Doctor says, the common level of humanity must necessarily be considerably higher, and "the malarial swamps of the submerged masses" must have been at least partially obliterated. This seems to follow as an engineering and a philosophical necessity. The filling of figurative and other swamps has been going on in this country quite steadily for some time, it seems to us.

We have faith in democracy,—greater faith than ever before; we have joy in the demonstra-

tion of its power; we believe its future is to be glorious, as its past has been, in achievements for the amelioration of the conditions of mankind. Where Dr. Cram seems to see the "elimination" of democracy and the substitution of "a pure and perfectly irresponsible absolutism" in the quiet and cheerful submission of the people to the regulations of the administration in respect of food, fuel, industrial life, the public press and other affairs,—we see further evidence of the strength of democracy, proof of its adaptability to the stress of war, proof of a lofty spirit controlling the people.

It is hard for *us* to believe that there is living in these stirring days any man of a high order of intelligence, whose soul is so soured that he is not thrilled by the gratifying and wonderful response of the great democracies of the world to the challenge of autocracy; who does not find pride and joy in the alacrity, the courage, the practical unanimity, the determination, the growing efficiency, with which all classes of the people,—the rich, the poor, the high, the low, the "mongrels" and the "flotsam",—have come forward and entered upon their several war tasks,—wives and daughters leaving luxurious homes and with all their souls and talents and endurance engaging in the drudgery of Red Cross hospitals and canteens in France and Italy; those who re-

main at home devoting themselves with daily earnestness to war service; labor putting new emphasis upon its war efforts; capital subordinating itself to the great object; manhood meeting cheerfully the call to arms and to service; and the distinction of classes being rapidly eliminated.

It is hard for *us* to believe that in such a time as this an "intellectual" can bring himself to the point of publishing a disheartening message to people so engaged.¹³ The bad effect of it,—if it has any effect,—can be seen by any one. Common sense is not yet an amorphous virtue.

We think the world may get along quite well even though it may not be able to put its finger on a universally recognized "great leader" in literature, art, philosophy and in each of the other great activities of the day. Perhaps in some decades, in some activities, the multiplicity of men "of only a little less eminence," or even considerably less, may neutralize the absence of univer-

¹³In all the 52 pages of *The Nemesis* there is not a complimentary word said of any nation or class or individual engaged in the fight over there! The first edition of *The Nemesis* came out in December, 1917, shortly after the Italian retreat to the Piave. The second edition was offered in May, 1918, when the hearts of the Allied nations were suffering as a result of the German advance into France. What a cheering message to give out, was *The Nemesis*, at those times!

sally recognized great leaders. Perhaps, as before hinted, they exist but are not yet generally known as such,—at least to Dr. Cram.

With these thoughts in mind, let us meet the Doctor's challenge before mentioned,—a presumption on the part of this mediocrity almost equaling that of the Doctor.

Is it true that before 1905, all of the great leaders died; that "under no circumstances whatever" may the leadership that has come since that eventful year, "be assumed to serve as a substitute?"

Comparisons are as odious as ever, in all fields; but they have been made in *The Nemesis* on a wholesale plan.

In the field of war, Von Moltke, the Prussian, is named among the immortal eighteen,—Von Moltke, whose victories were in a six weeks war with the moribund Austrian monarchy and in a six months war with France after a reign of twenty years by the autocratic Emperor, Napoleon III. Let us timidly suggest as a "substitute" a Frenchman by the name of FOCH, the product of fifty years of democracy in France. And there are several others.

In the ecclesiastic field, Pope Leo XIII and Cardinal Newman are named among the eighteen.

We are not versed in ecclesiasticism, but there is a CARDINAL MERCIER, whom the lecturer refers to "as one man at least who measures up to the great controlling and directing agencies" of the period from 1880 to 1905 on which the lecturer is so solidly set. Why then not say in plain words that this surpassingly great and brave example of devotion to principle and humanitarianism, who has made his name truly immortal, results in at least *two* exceptions to the Cram rule? What qualities are lacking to bar the Cardinal of Malines from the list? And among clericals of great power and of wide influence, to be mentioned, even if their eminence be somewhat less, there was, long after 1905, an ARCHBISHOP IRELAND, and there is a JOWETT in London and a JEFFERSON in New York and a ROBERT FREEMAN in the West.

Neither are we versed in the field of philosophy; indeed we sometimes think, with great respect for the "friends of wisdom," that the best philosophers are often men who never heard of Kant or Hegel, who never read a book dealing with the subject, but are nevertheless great philosophers, because, like JAMES J. HILL, they intuitively find the truth and the explanation, and read and expound the signs of the times, fore-

seeing the trend of human events. When James J. Hill spoke to the people, they listened. Such a philosopher, when he has character and common sense and broad contact with humanity, is worth to the world a thousand of the philosophers of the cloister or the den. Before being alarmed over a dearth of present day expert philosophers,—if there be one,—we would want to hear just what expert philosophers of the past have done, not merely to brighten the firesides of the “intellectuals”, but to help redeem the world. Would not philosophy be classed these days as a non-essential industry?

In the field of art we are also deficient; but we know of a SARGENT and a RODIN and a LORADO TAFT and others, and we are told that CLAUDE MONET is a great leader, that he has revolutionized landscape painting, established a new school of art, and that his influence is felt, consciously or unconsciously, by every living cultured person. In architecture, may we not set down as a great leader, nolens volens, RALPH ADAMS CRAM, big enough in that specialty to have produced authoritative books and to be selected to pursue the construction of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York?

In the field of literature: No one belittles the immortal Stevenson, nor Tourguenieff, but there is a KIPLING and a WELLS. No one underestimates that other immortal, Browning (no one who knows him) but there are the works of JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY, which have reached ten thousand times as many firesides, and have won as many times more hearts, and have done as many times more good to humanity; and they will continue their mission for generations to come. Keeping in mind the argument that the world is on the brink of damnation for want of leaders, who shall say whether Browning or Riley made the larger contribution toward staying its frightful course? Carlyle's "French Revolution" and his "Frederic II" and other works are no doubt great and decidedly unique productions; and Carlyle was undoubtedly a man of wide intellectual influence; but the present generation finds delight, instruction, and satisfaction in such high class works as "The Dawn of Italian Independence" and "The Life and Times of Cavour" and other works by WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER, and in the productions of the two TREVELYANS, and in those of ROOSEVELT, and of many other contemporaries. And they serve not merely as a "supplement" but as a very satisfactory "substitute."

In the field of statesmanship: ASQUITH was great enough, with SIR EDWARD (now Viscount) GREY, in a great and sudden crisis, the greatest by far that ever confronted the British nation, to decide, quickly and rightly, the greatest question ever put before the nation, and to lead it promptly to the defense of honor, and at a time when less than great men would have faltered, which, thank God, they did not. LLOYD GEORGE is great enough, in times that try men's souls, to have and to deserve the support and praise and applause of a great part of the British people, and indeed, of the people of the world, and he is so great a leader that his premature death would be deemed a calamity by the people of almost every country on the face of the globe. CLEMENCEAU: Does not he, "fill the bill,"—to use a now classical expression? Does not he, with credit and honor, perform the great duties and meet the heavy responsibilities of the high position to which he was called by his countrymen? What is lacking to make that fiery old French patriot and leader eligible to the list? What are we to say,—or rather think,—of one who, at this time, in a public print, by a single word "superannuated," disposes of this representative of FRANCE? Even a Cram vocabulary would be inadequate for the expression of our feel-

ings. But there come to mind words attributed to another great Frenchman: "Irreverent ribald! Beware then the falling ruins!"

In the field of statesmanship at home: WILSON is a great leader, and there is no need of a qualifying "if" or "perhaps" or "to that extent." The whole world knows it,—except Dr. Cram.

ROOSEVELT is a great leader,—for his many-sidedness; for his devotion to the interests of the masses; for his accomplishments in their behalf; for his fearlessness of all classes; for his boldness of utterance; for his literary productions and wide culture; for his unquestioned competency as an executive; for leadership based on the comprehension by the hundreds of thousands of his followers of his force and dominance. TAFT is a great leader,—for broadguaged executive, administrative and judicial powers, proved in highly honorable participation in world work in the highest offices. ROOT is a great leader,—for modern diplomacy of a high order, utterly free from demagogy; for his keen and brilliant powers of analysis; for conspicuous and highly successful service to his country. HUGHES is a great leader,—for exceptional courage of conviction; for high executive and judicial qualities; for the confidence which millions of Americans

have shown in him. LODGE is a great leader, —for his conspicuously able service in the Senate; for common sense, and at the same time great intellectual attainments, which latter must not altogether be lost in that once august body.

The Nemesis seems to put a ban on great leaders in mere business affairs, such as applied science, industrial organization, banking, economic efficiency, and on great leaders in journalism, thus barring mention of such men as SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY, MAYO BROTHERS, GORGAS, EDISON, MARCONI, and WRIGHT, in science; HILL, WILLARD, GARY, ARMOUR, GOETHALS, GRANT SMITH, and others, in industrial organization and economic efficiency; MORGAN, STILLMAN, BAKER, WARBURG, VANDERLIP, FORGAN, REYNOLDS, MC ADOO and others, in banking and finance; LYMAN ABBOTT, HENRY WATTERSON, GEORGE HARVEY *and* HARRISON GRAY OTIS, in journalism.

But men who at great personal pecuniary sacrifice, from purely patriotic motives or a simple desire to go about "doing good," are showing conspicuous powers of leadership in public office or in great human causes and movements, many of them rendering world-wide service, making their names honored throughout Christendom,—

these are not in terms banned by The Nemesis, and a few may be mentioned. CHIEF JUSTICE WHITE is a great leader in judicial affairs,—proved by many years of conspicuously great service on the bench. SECRETARY LANE is a great leader,—for his courage and fairness as an Interstate Commerce Commissioner; for his vision and foresight and common sense of an extraordinary kind in the conservation and development of natural resources; for his modest leadership in many phases of Americanization, a “forward looking man” who has the respect and admiration of citizens generally, a man of presidential proportions. HOOVER is a great leader,—for his splendid world service; extraordinary administrative ability; phenomenal tact in dealing with the masses, and other fine qualities; another man of presidential proportions, when the country wants a real administrator at its head. MOTT is a great leader,—for his lifetime of devotion to a great humanitarian cause, devotion coupled with industry, a high order of ability and admitted qualities of leadership, and with a soul and a character that have touched the hearts and indelibly influenced for good the destiny of hundreds of thousands of men in many parts of the world. We would not like to be charged with the task

of proving that any six of Dr. Cram's immortal eighteen have, combined, done so much as John R. Mott to advance the cause of humanity throughout the world. DAVISON is a great leader,—for his splendid management of the greatest single humanitarian agency in times of war that the world has ever known; for his vision, courage and confidence; for his dynamic personality; for his qualities of quiet domination. SCHWAB is a great leader,—for that rare combination of qualities that enable him to manage vast enterprises and to arouse great masses of men to their utmost endeavor,—a man who knows human nature, a man born to lead if ever there was one. CROWDER is a great leader,—for his masterful powers of organization, a striking example of the truth of the saying that the times produce the man; and in this instance he was produced without delay. Crowder has never been run over by the procession. GOMPERS is a great leader,—proved by his long retention of the position he now holds at the head of organized labor; for none but a great leader could have such honor; proved by his freedom from dogmas, by his unalterable determination along lines which he believes to be for the good of his followers; proved by his patriotism, by his good sense, by

his rejection early in the war of the camouflaged German propaganda. The nation owes much to Samuel Gompers.

It is not necessary for us to say that the men named are great leaders in the sense that Julius Caesar, Martin Luther, Cardinal Richelieu, Oliver Cromwell, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were great leaders. Having in mind the Cram thesis that the world is going to —— perdition, for want of great leaders, it is enough to say that they are playing as great a part in keeping the world right side up as was played by the “immortals” of the 1880-1905 period,—Karl Marx, William Morris, Darwin, Tourguenieff, Browning, Stevenson, Ruskin, Spencer, etc.

Greatness in men is an indefinable thing. Times change and the standards of greatness change with the times.

The world is not going to the demnition bow-wows. It is not the crack of doom that Dr. Cram hears. It is a fight for greater liberty. The fight is proving that in a democracy as well as in an autocracy, efficiency may be general.

And in this period of ours, since that fateful year 1905, has not really great progress been

made?—in the protection of the health and lives of the people,—in the prevention of industrial accidents,—in the conservation of natural resources and the utilization of the public domain,—in the wise restriction of immigration and the assimilation of the foreign element in our midst,—in the regulation for the common good of big business,—in halting the concentration in a few of vast powers over public enterprises,—in making wealth the servant, not the master of the people,—in giving to labor priority and independence of capital, while still protecting the rights of the latter,—and in the cultivation of a wonderful spirit of giving, by high and by low, by rich and by poor, to great humanitarian causes.

What was done in that great leadership period of 1880-1905, that surpasses or even equals the subsequent achievements, in ameliorating the conditions of the people,—in bringing us nearer to the aims of democracy “in its protean forms,” abolition of privilege, equal opportunity for all and utilization of ability?

The world is now being made safe for democracy. When that job is done, democracy itself will have attention. If it is not already safe for the world, it will be made so. In that task there will be working the millions of our citizens who

have served at the front,—pure “Americans,” hyphenates, and all those “mongrels” we have heard about,—regenerated by the war,—whose influence in their counties, their states, their nation, yes, even in international affairs, will be well nigh controlling,—from whom our executives and legislators and judges for the next fifty years will be chosen,—whose influence will be for good. They will have more than the narrow view of former days; they will know better what constitutes a great man; they will far more easily detect the counterfeit; they will no longer be so much deceived by “the specious demagogue, the unscrupulous master of effrontery” of which there are far too many, we admit. Those returning men will be acute critics of municipal, state and national conditions. They will have learned discipline and efficiency. They will have a new and broader view of life, a greater appreciation of their fellow-citizens of all nationalities, types and classes. They will know, as they never knew before, that all classes of people,—the rich as well as the poor, the “intellectuals” and the “uncouth flotsam,” the native born and the welcomed from foreign lands,—have hearts in the right place, have rights to be respected and preserved, and their parts to play in the regeneration of the world, toward the accomplishment of which the

war has done so much. No longer will the rating by Dun or Bradstreet, nor the life history found in "Who's Who", nor the social Blue Book, nor position in business, *nor intellectuality*,—be considered the important thing. It will be effective personal service in the great cause of humanity, in high or low places, under the dictates of conscience and duty, free from selfish motives.

A few days after the assassination of Lincoln, at a public meeting in Concord, Emerson closed a great address with these words:

"The ancients believed in a serene and beautiful Genius which ruled in the affairs of nations; which, with a slow but stern justice, carried forward the fortunes of certain chosen houses, weeding out single offenders or offending families, and securing at last the firm prosperity of the favorites of Heaven. It was too narrow a view of the *Eternal Nemesis*. There is a serene Providence which rules the fate of nations, which makes little account of time, little of one generation or race, makes no account of disasters, conquers alike by what is called defeat or by what is called victory, thrusts aside enemy and obstruction, crushes everything immoral as inhuman, and obtains the ultimate triumph of the best race by the sacrifice of every-

thing which resists the moral laws of the world. It makes its own instruments, *creates the man for the time*, trains him in poverty, inspires his genius, and arms him for the task. It has given every race its own talent, and ordains that only that race which combines perfectly with the virtues of all, shall endure."

Mediocrity is a relative and therefore changing term. There are now and always will be many mediocrities. They are the bone and sinew of every land. Perhaps they are not lead so much by the intellectual nobility as might be thought. Not impossibly, the intellectual nobility are in some lines the followers. So far as mediocrities need leadership, they have it, and it "matches in power the exigency of the demand."

The Nemesis of Mediocrity is a mere figment of the brain. He who entertains the idea of its existence needs a change of environment, a prolonged one, a chance of thought, a complete one. If he be not too far advanced in the folly, he may yet live it down.¹⁴

¹⁴A friend to whom this manuscript was shown expressed the opinion that too much powder has been used in dealing with The Nemesis. When asked for an ex-

The Eternal Nemesis is now engaged in the chastisement of nations which have resisted the moral laws of the world. The times have created the man for every part of the task. The man has been inspired and armed. The chastisement is to be thorough.

planation, he added that The Nemesis had caused about as big a ripple as was caused by Mr. Pickwick's "Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats." An unkind comparison, say we.



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